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RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE 5461
RUEHQH/AMEMBASSY QUITO 8024
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4895
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SUBJECT: AWA INDIGENOUS SEARCH FOR MEMBERS SLAIN BY FARC; 8 BODIES FOUND

REF: BOGOTA 00488 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY

¶11. (U) An indigenous humanitarian mission of 600 returned to the Awa community in Narino department where the FARC killed at least eight Awa members in February. Search parties found eight bodies in the area. The mission was greatly complicated by security concerns, which also prevented any international humanitarian organizations from participating. The indigenous rights advocacy group ONIC, which organized the mission, also used the opportunity to reiterate its position that all armed groups should refrain from entering indigenous territories. Approximately 1000 Awa who remain in the area have been confined to their homes as a result of threats from the FARC. END SUMMARY.

Awa Humanitarian Mission Locates 8 Bodies

¶12. (U) An indigenous humanitarian mission ("Minga") of more than 600 from the Awa indigenous tribe set out on March 23 to search for the remains of Awa members whom the FARC killed earlier this year in a remote area of Barbacoas, Narino department. The FARC admitted murdering eight Awa for allegedly collaborating with the Colombian military. Awa leaders said 17 members of the community were missing. Search teams located eight bodies near Tortugana Telembi, the Awa community where the attacks took place on February 4. Of the eight, five bodies are believed to be from the February 4 attacks, and the other three are thought to be from a separate FARC attack on a nearby Awa community last September. Vanessa May, a coordinator at the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), told us the approximately 1000 Awa who remain in the area have been confined to their homes for more than a month as a result of ongoing threats from the FARC. The search mission ended on April 2.

Security Concerns Greatly Complicate Mission

¶13. (U) The indigenous "Minga," which was organized by the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), was delayed several times due to security concerns. Access to the remote Awa community is difficult due to extensive

illegal coca cultivation, widespread use of landmines, and the heavy presence of various illegal armed groups. Interior Minister Fabio Valencia offered to provide a security escort to the mission, but the Awa refused, relying instead on their own "indigenous guards." Several human rights groups and a delegation from the Ombudsman's Office (Defensoria) accompanied the group. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) did not join the mission for security reasons. International and national humanitarian organizations still have not been able to access the area to provide assistance.

¶4. (U) The "Minga's" purpose was three-fold: 1) to accompany families of victims to the area and to offer protection to the Awa community that did not leave after the attacks, 2) to locate the victims' bodies and determine what transpired, and 3) to reaffirm ONIC's political position that indigenous tribes are neutral in the conflict and that all armed groups should refrain from entering their territories. ONIC also called on the Prosecutor General's Office to investigate the crimes, and asked the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to help support the mission and coordinate international community assistance.

FARC Threats Keep 500 Displaced and 1000 Confined to Homes

¶5. (U) Immediately following the February 4 FARC attack on the community, more than 500 Awa fled the area to surrounding towns and villages. The GOC, along with international

humanitarian organizations, provided relief to the internally displaced Awa. After meeting with 300 displaced in the village of El Diviso of February 18, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Deputy Commissioner Craig Johnstone commended the Government's efficient coordination of shelter and food assistance saying "it should be a model for all cases of forced displacement."

¶6. (U) ONIC President Luis Andrade said that of the 35,000 Awa living in Narino department, 60 percent have been displaced as a result of the armed conflict. In addition, Andrade said armed groups have killed 1240 indigenous over the last six years, with some 50,000 displaced.

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